DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 179 543 SP 015 247

AUTHOR Parkay, Forrest W.
TITLE An Intellectual Posture for Teacher Educators: Two Approaches.
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Theories; *Humanistic Education; Personal Growth; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Characteristics; *Teacher Education; *Teacher Educators; *Teaching Quality; Teaching Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Dewey (John); *Wilson (John)

ABSTRACT

An intellectually clear conceptual base upon which to formulate a study of teacher education is considered. To achieve this conceptual clarification, two intellectual postures are described: John Dewey's "intellectual method" and John Wilson's intellectual "way of working." Three interrelated dimensions of an intellectual posture are discussed: (1) the attitudes or characteristics of the professional; (2) the professional's assumptions about the kind and quality of understandings necessary for serious inquiry into educational problems; and (3) the methodology or procedures of the professional's intellectual method. It is concluded that the implementation of either of these two intellectual approaches depends not only on the ability to be methodologically rigorous, but also on the capacity to approach educational problems with personal artistry and style. (Author/JD)

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AN INTELLECTUAL POSTURE FOR TEACHER EDUCATORS: TWO APPROACHES*

Forrest W. Parkay, Ph.D.

Department of Education

Southwest Texas State University

San Marcos, Texas 78666

*I am grateful to Sharon Feiman, Associate Professor of Education at Michigan State University, for her helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper. In addition, I have a profound obligation to Herbert A. Thelen, Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago; during our long-standing dialogue on the educative process, he has shown me most clearly what an intellectual posture for teacher educators is all about.

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ABSTRACT

An Intellectual Posture for Teacher Educators: Two Approaches

The current trend among many teacher educators to reduce teaching to a series of observable, measurable behaviors or "competencies" is misguided and premature, given our present knowledge about the educative process. Instead, an intellectually clear conceptual base upon which to formulate a study of teacher education is needed.

To achieve this conceptual clarification, the author describes two "intellectual postures"--an "intellectual method" based on John Dewey's "The Relation of Theory to Practice in Education" and an intellectual "way of working" based on John Wilson's Educational Theory and the Preparation of Teachers.

Three interrelated dimensions of an intellectual posture are then discussed: 1) the personal dispositions (attitudes or characteristics) of the professional, 2) his assumptions about the kind and quality of understandings necessary for serious inquiry into educational problems, and 3) the methodology or procedures of his intellectual method.

Finally, the author concludes by stating that the implementation of either of these two intellectual approaches depends not only on one's ability to be methodologically, or "scientifically," rigorous but also on the capacity to approach educational problems with personal artistry and style.

An Intellectual Posture for Teacher Educators: Two Approaches

Many teacher educators are currently searching for ways to observe and to measure the combination of skills, attitudes, and theoretical understandings that characterizes the performance of effective teachers. Robert F. Peck and James A. Tucker summarize the results of these efforts in their chapter on teacher education in the Second Handbook of Research on Teaching:

> Just within the past 10 to 15 years the operational skills of teaching have become better defined and measured than ever before.... We are genuninely in sight of the theoretical principles, the operational measures, and even the developmental technology for moving into a performance-based method of appraising teachers (1973, pp. 970-71).

While this quest for the proper substance of teacher education programs has yielded useful insights, (at least it has added to our ways of thinking about teaching/learning), such work too often proceeds without a prior attempt to reach the wisdom of a deeper intellectual understanding of the educative process--an understanding which views teaching not as an amalgam of observable, measurable behaviors but as a civilized, humane activity designed to facilitate the growth of human beings through helping them confront and interpret the meaning of their experiences.

The "science" Peck and Tucker allude to is not adequate for a study of the true nature and purpose of teaching, (empirical science is concerned with what is, while education is concerned, additionally, with what ought to be). Theoretical, moral, and, ultimately, philosophical understandings (ideally, the result of man's best intellectual efforts) are needed to guide the use of today's technology in education, and this technology ought to be subservient to education's goal of achieving "higher," more humane conditions for men's lives.

Thus, while Peck and Tucker may call for research "...to continue and strengthen the empirical base for making sound, major decisions about teacher education" (p. 971, [my italics]), what is needed first is a method for achieving an intellectually clear conceptual base upon which to construct a study of teacher education. Without attention to this conceptual foundation, (or to the understandings about education that are to guide the teacher educator's actions), education will continue to invite critics such as F. Raymond McKenna who points to "...the intellectual vacuums in many teacher education courses, and research that substitutes for thinking..." (1976, p. 108), or James D. Koerner who asserts that "The inferior intellectual quality of the education faculty is the fundamental limitation of the field..." (1963, p. 17).

An Intellectual Posture: Two Approaches

The purpose of this paper, then, is to clarify two intellectual approaches to the study of teacher education, either of which (or both in a dialectical relationship) ought to be the sine qua non of teacher education as a profession. Drawing from John Dewey's "The Relation of Theory to Practice in Education" (1904) and John Wilson's Educational Theory and the Preparation of Teachers (1975), I will try to show how Dewey's "intellectual method" and Wilson's "way of working" suggest an appropriate framework to guide the inquiry of teacher educators. In pursuit of what these intellectual approaches might mean in terms of explicit behavior, (for those who would want to know precisely what this new breed of teacher educator would do), it is possible that my analysis will raise more questions than it answers. The task of integrating a wide range of understandings, attitudes, and behaviors into teacher education programs whose thrust is oriented toward solving concrete educational problems is difficult and complex, and, ultimately, we can specify only the mental attitude with which one approaches an educational

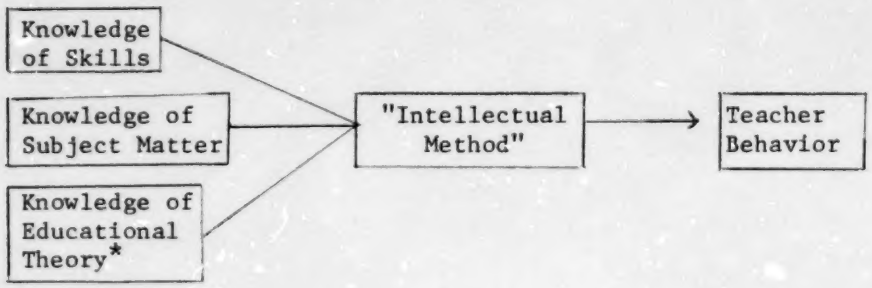
problem--not what one does in response to that problem.

Dewey's "Intellectual Method"

Dewey proposes that teachers acquire a fundamental mental process whose ultimate aim is "...the intellectual method and material of good workmanship" (p. 10). According to Dewey, an internalized understanding of this "intellectual method" can guide the teacher as he employs his knowledge of skills and knowledge of subject matter and of educational theory. This relationship of knowledge and practice we may view as in Figure 1:

FIGURE 1

Dewey's "Intellectual Method"



*The "psychology, logic, and history of education" (p. 14).

Wilson's "Way of Working"

More recently, Wilson contends that "...most 'theory' and 'method work,' as it stands, is rubbish, and most 'practice' gives the student little that he cannot better pick up for himself in a 'real' job" (p. 163). Like Dewey, Wilson asserts that we need a "particular way of working" that gets "...students to take educational problems with much more intellectual seriousness" (p. 159). Through adopting this intellectual posture, Wilson contends, teacher educators can begin to "sort out" the "hopeless muddle or mess" (p. 19) which

presently characterizes thought about education.

While Dewey and Wilson differ in their conceptions of the current state of educational knowledge, they agree, in many ways, on the methodological process needed for educational inquiry. Both emphasize the importance of a disciplined intellectual stance toward the preparation of teachers--a stance which the teacher education establishment has evidently neither accepted completely nor understood fully.

To clarify what is meant by an intellectual posture for teacher educators, then, questions like the following have to be posed, (questions whose answers, in the final analysis, might have to be answered anew by each teacher educator who aspires to take on the intellectual methods of either Dewey or Wilson): What does it mean, a la Dewey, to be a "thoughtful and alert student of education"? (p. 15); or, how does one know if he has "a sense of what adequate and genuine intellectual activity means"? (p. 22). And for Wilson: What "counts" as taking "educational problems with much more intellectual seriousness"? (p. 124). Or, what is it to approach an educational topic with "honesty and seriousness"? (p. 170).

Three Components of an Intellectual Posture

In our attempt to clarify an "intellectual posture" for the teacher educator, we may consider three interrelated components of this way of thinking: 1) the personal dispositions (attitudes or characteristics) of the professional, 2) his assumptions about the kind and quality of understandings necessary for serious inquiry into educational problems, and 3) the methodology or procedures of his intellectual method.

Personal Dispositions

By disposition, I refer to one's customary or habitual way of responding to problem situations in education. An evaluation of these responses in turn

reveals, or hints at, underlying attitudes or characteristics which indicate the professional's willingness to undergo the effort of a rigorous intellectual method and further determine the final quality of his work.

Dispositions for an "Intellectual Method"

Dewey suggests several dispositions, the essence of which we may view as a commitment to intellectual excellence. Teacher educators capable of internalizing this intellectual method, Dewey states, are characterized by:

1. Intellectual responsibility and independence.
2. Initiative.
3. Skill in scholarship per se.
4. The willingness to be a "thoughtful and alert" student of education.
5. The spirit of inquiry.

The above list of qualities may seem to some, (we might say to those who least possess them and thus seldom experience their power), hopelessly value laden and nonspecific. And the most direct statement Dewey gives us as to what these qualities might really mean is to say that the habits of a teacher are "...formed under the inspiration and constant criticism of intelligence, applying the best that is available" (p. 15).

In some way, perhaps every teacher educator imagines he possesses these dispositions; therefore, to work out a precise definition (if such were even possible) for "intellectual responsibility" or for "the spirit of inquiry" would be to miss the major thrust of Dewey's argument. What I wish to point out instead is Dewey's belief that the professional should realize the need to grow to ever-increasing levels of excellence and competence through the full exercise and development of these dispositions. This willingness to grow, characterized by an intellectual vitality and commitment to ideas, is doubtless what Dewey has in mind when he calls for "thoughtful and alert students of education"--they are open to ways to further their intellectual understanding of education and, indeed, actively seek such growth. Further-

more, these students have faith in the power of the intellectual method; they realize that the "higher" processes of thought are emergent knowledge and are not amenable to formulations in specific behavioral terms.

Dispositions for a "Way of Working"

Turning to Wilson, we find that the dispositions he recommends for teacher educators focus on "seriousness" and intellectual competence; his teacher educator is, he states, characterized as having:

1. High general intelligence.
2. The nerve, time, and seriousness to "set things straight."
3. An honest attitude (the ability to transmit care and seriousness about learning).
4. Intellectual and moral seriousness.
5. High methodological and philosophical competence.
6. A desire to bring abilities to bear on educational theory.
7. A wish to communicate, to engage in dialectical processes.
8. A "passion" for shared clarification.
9. Trust and warmth.

The dispositions necessary for competence in Wilson's "way of working" are compatable with and, to some degree, enhance our previous portrait of Dewey's professional. There is, though, a fundamental difference in emphasis: the intellectual dispositions Dewey advocates stress the ability to draw meaningful theoretical formulations from the experiential world. Wilson's criteria, on the other hand, are aimed at the (some might say more practical) matter of achieving competence with a set of methodological procedures in order to clarify problems in education and to guide professional action. Dewey calls for educators who are commited to a richer, "higher level" quest for meaning in educational practices, while Wilson hopes for professionals who have the disposition to approach educational problems with honesty and careful, critical intellectual skill. These characteristics Wilson subsumes under the term "seriousness" which he defines through asking the following questions about the professional:

> Is he guided by evidence rather than by his own partisan attachments? Does he welcome criticism? Is he not only able but anxious to test out his views by engaging in hard and sustained discussion of them with other people? Is he keen on making sure that his views are clearly-expressed and unambiguous? Is he capable of questioning his own role, or identity, or "vested interests" of any kind? Does he try as hard as he can to understand what other people are saying? (p. 87).

In general, Wilson stresses personal qualities necessary to facilitate rationality, while Dewey stresses understanding a larger way of life based on reason as it is in transaction with transcendental and spiritual meanings.

Theoretical Understandings Necessary For Serious Inquiry into Education

An intellectual posture for teacher educators requires of the professional not only certain key personal dispositions but also certain theoretical "understandings" about what is necessary for serious inquiry into educational problems. To some extent, the distinction between these "understandings" and "personal dispositions" is blurred; it is difficult to imagine one existing without the other. In essence, though, these understandings are internalized theoretical insights about education and knowledge which, consciously and unconsciously, guide the professional's thought and action. These assumptions form a personal orientation toward, or way of viewing, the educative process; the stance grows out of insights or hypotheses that the teacher educator develops through reflecting on the experience of professional practice.

Understandings for an "Intellectual Method"

The understandings Dewey calls for are the result of the professional's intelligence purposively reorganizing, reconstructing, and interpreting his experience. Through thus evaluating his experience, the educator, Dewey contends, develops the following understandings:

1. A spontaneous, unconscious appreciation of how to direct mental activity.
2. The knowledge of how and why certain methods work.
3. A sense of what "adequate and genuine" intellectual activity means.
4. The ability to see and to feel "embodiments" of mental operations.
5. Effective understanding of, and control of, the mind's natural attitudes, impulses, and responses.
6. Insight into "soul action" (ability for psychological insight and interpretation).
7. An appreciation of the method of mind in its search for truth.
8. The habit of viewing curriculum as a continuous growth, reflecting the growth of mind itself.
9. A knowledge of the classifications, interpretations, explanations, and generalizations of subject matter.

To the extent that a teacher educator has internalized, or become "saturated with," these understandings, he will have the ability to comprehend the meaning inherent in each new situation. These understandings, therefore, constitute what we might call a philosophic dynamic; this dynamic, or energizing force, is at the core of Dewey's intellectual method. As he explains elsewhere: "...the wholeness characteristic of philosophy is a power to learn, or to extract meaning, from even the unpleasant vicissitudes of experience and to embody what is learned in an ability to go on learning..." (1916, p. 380, [my italics]).

Understandings for a "Way of Working"

The understandings Wilson prescribes for educators are oriented toward the ability to clarify conceptually problems in education. Most important here, according to Wilson, is the teacher educator's insight into the nature of the problem under scrutiny and his skill in utilizing appropriate disciplines to solve the problem. The following understandings he posits as essential for this "way of working":

1. Knowledge that educational problems are primarily intellectual ones.
2. A clear grasp of the demands of the problem.
3. The realization that, while no reputable theory presently exists to guide educators, teaching/learning does have to be considered from a theoretical standpoint.

4. An appreciation for the right kind of "intellectual posture," (a Socratic approach aimed at conceptual clarification).
5. Understanding of what kind of inquiry and learning best fit the context of a particular problem.
6. Understanding of (and, so far as possible, the ability to control, or at least allow for) one's own personality.
7. An appreciation for the artistic, or aesthetic, quality of the "way of working."
8. The ability to employ practical "know-how" in pursuit of answers to educational problems.

Once he has acquired and internalized these understandings, the teacher educator can further employ Wilson's "way of working' and move into the specific procedures for "making sense."

Procedures for an "Intellectual Method" And for "A Way of Working"

By now, we have largely anticipated the specific methodology of both Dewey's "intellectual method" and Wilson's "way of working."

A Methodology for an "Intellectual Method"

Dewey's intellectual method involves a process in which the teacher educator functions as the judge and critic of his own actions; he adopts a habit of mind that is commited to a "...search for, and transaction with, the truth of things" (p. 24). Consequently, the teacher educator is himself engaged in theorizing about education; he formulates hypotheses which he tests and modifies in view of a sensitive understanding of himself and his students. Through insights drawn from continual feedback and reflection, he is able to grow toward increased effectiveness in providing his students with educative, growth-promoting experiences. The key components of this process may be outlined as follows:

1. The method proceeds under the "inspiration and constant criticism of intelligence."
2. Observation, insight, and reflection are employed (both consciously and unconsciously).
3. The emphasis is on convergence and concentration, thinking rather than drill.

4. All subject-matter (whether theoretical or practical) is presented as an embodiment of this "method of mind."
5. The process further involves turning back upon one's own experiences to see growth in terms of certain "laws and principles."

What Dewey proposes in the above steps is not a set of specific procedures to guide instruction but rather a way to nurture an inquiring habit of mind which will enable the teacher educator to make spontaneous, appropriate professional decisions to best meet the stream of events he experiences in the classroom. His intellectual method is, however, ultimately felt as personal, private, and intuitive--unable to be set down in precise behavioral terms.

All this is apt to sound hopelessly vague and of little help to the teacher educator who wants to know what to do. Yet, Dewey's intellectual method does imply what the professional can do--and that is to ask what resources do I have to understand better my situation? Once the teacher educator makes a strong commitment to an internal dialectic of this sort, he is able to generate his own intelligent understandings to guide present action. Theory can do no more.

A Methodology for "A Way of Working"

Wilson's procedure for "a way of working," or his "general strategy" for approaching educational problems, is straightforward: "...we have to start with clarifying some objectives, consider the practical difficulties of achieving it, and pick up whatever empirical knowledge we find to be relevant on the way" (p. 62). Wilson provides additional guidelines for the teacher educator which are summarized below:

1. Relevance to learning is the guide for procedures.
2. Begin with clarification, sorting out the "muddle" through intense reflection and "sheer hard thinking and arguing."
3. Realize that the complexity of educational problems requires a multidisciplinary approach.
4. Procedures involve conceptual clarification, ("making sense" rather than data collection and statistical analysis).
5. Procedure is dependent on the problem--inability to say beforehand what one would do or need to know.

The preceding methodology is essentially a "sophisticated way of looking at people learning" (p. 127), and, as Wilson makes clear, the method itself is the only theoretical component (if we may call a method a theory) in the approach:

> It is important to be clear that the merit of this approach stands on its own feet, and that it does not depend either (a) on the actual existence of any corpus of "established theory" within the various "disciplines," or (b) on the existence, or even the possibility, of "educational theory" producing general "practical principles" which all teachers should know (p. 128).

Elsewhere, Wilson states that "...the problems of methodology and 'making sense'...are central to educational theory" (p. 126); he therefore puts great emphasis on the procedures of his method rather than on its content. However, even this emphasis on procedures is limited--Wilson admits that we do not know precisely what a "good theorist" would do, and he is wary of educational study and research that, "prematurely" he would say, does know what to do.

The "Science" of an Intellectual Posture

The intellectual approaches of Dewey and Wilson are in many important respects "scientific"--if by "scientific" we refer to agreed-upon methods for employing the powers of reason and perception to develop, test, and modify hypotheses about the world.[1] In this regard, Dewey speaks of the "laboratory" approach to teacher training, and Wilson's "way of working" is based on sophisticated methodological competencies which we may term "scientific."

In sum, Dewey and Wilson urge the teacher educator to be involved in a continuous, critical, and "scientific" study of education--and from the careful execution of this study, "principles" or "laws" will emerge to guide further professional practice.

The "Art" or "Style" of an Intellectual Posture

It is wrong to assume that Dewey's "intellectual method" or Wilson's "way of working" make possible, in any literal sense, a science of education--though this hope now mistakenly motivates many well-intentioned educators. Neither method is reducible to easy-to-demonstrate steps that ensure particular results. Furthermore, these two intellectual postures are so dependent on the kind of person one is, that it makes sense here to speak of personal artistry or style in implementing these approaches. (One may, as suggested earlier, choose to integrate, through an internal dialectic, the two approaches; and, ultimately, this may make the most "sense.") An intellectual posture for teacher educators is finally a value to be felt because it activates those faculties (imagination, emotion, and intuition) we normally reserve for discussions of art. As Herbert Thelen (1972) suggests, educational theory, though we may strive to make it objective and thoroughly rational, must be personally meaningful in terms of our individual perceptions of education--and of life:

> The sort of general theory we need takes in a lot of territory; it makes sense for all educational situations. It is also believable; it snuggles down where we live and resonates with our reflected-upon experience. It makes sense even though it cannot be demonstrated by scientific data alone, though neither will it be disproved (p. 12).

Notes

1. Schwab (1969) also advocates a careful, disciplined approach to educational problems. His approach, termed "deliberation," seeks to identify relevant facts and then weigh alternatives and their costs and consequences before selecting the best (rather than "right") alternative.

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